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Mill West complex tested for lead

MANCHESTER — The city's top health official said he could know as early as today whether dust collected at Mill West, the sprawling West Side office and residential complex, has high levels of lead.

On Monday, the Manchester Health Department shut down an interior sandblasting operation because it lacked the proper permits. And on Wednesday, a resident provided the New Hampshire Union Leader with test results that showed high levels of lead in dust collected from his third-floor apartment as well as a Mill West stairwell.

But Brady Sullivan Properties, which is making some of the final conversions of the mill building, insists that its contractor followed proper procedures, including cleanings, air testing, sealing the work area and creating a negative pressure system to confine any dust.

"It's impossible for any of this dust to flow out of the work area," said Marc Pinard, general counsel for Brady-Sullivan. "Lead dust traveling a couple of floors up is hard to believe."



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The first floor of the Lofts at Mill West is under construction. (DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER)



Pinard said some quick tests performed by state and federal officials found no lead.

The tenant, who did not want to be named, shared the results of samples that were collected on Monday. Six were from the third-floor apartment, one from the floor of the northwest stairwell.

The stairwell had the highest reading — 25,000 micrograms per square foot, which is more than 600 times acceptable levels, according to the 11-page analysis. Lead from dust found in the apartment levels ranged from about three times to 50 times acceptable levels.

“If these lead levels are throughout the building, then the people in the building are at risk,” said Debbie Valente, owner of Alchemy Lead Management, which the tenant hired to collect the samples and ship them to a private lab in Virginia for analysis. She said Brady Sullivan should notify tenants of possible problems, test the property itself, and then clean.

Valente said she visited Mill West on Monday. Dust was everywhere, she said, and she saw doors open and sandblasting taking place. “It was actually like a fog,” she said.

On Tuesday, officials from the state Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Manchester Health Department met with the contractor at Mill West, said Tim Soucy,



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An environmental services truck was parked in the lot at Lofts at Mill West in Manchester on Wednesday. (DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER)



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Manchester health director.

A day earlier, his department halted the work because the sandblaster — Environmental Compliance Specialist Inc. — did not have a local permit to sandblast. Soucy said the contractor apparently was unaware of the local requirement, which is in place to minimize lead exposure.

“As of right now, the work is stopped,” Soucy said. “We’re waiting for the results of state and EPA lead samples and will then make a decision on how to proceed.”

He said results from the state and EPA tests should be ready today.

Soucy said the contractor was following proper procedures when health inspectors showed up on Monday, but he doesn’t know if they had been followed for the previous 1 1/2 weeks that the work had been going on. He said one vacant floor separates the sandblasting from the top two floors of apartments.

Brady Sullivan plans to eventually lease out 300 apartments at Mill West, which also houses offices for the Manchester School District, the state Department of Health and Human Services, The Moore Center and other organizations.

The sandblasting was taking place in about 70,000 square feet of space that had been occupied by a storage company, Extra Space Storage. That company moved out after experiencing problems with lead dust last year.

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